

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHURCH FOR SOCIETY

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I. THE URGENCY OF THE QUESTION

The question of the Church's responsibility for the society in or with which it lives has been important and difficult since the beginning of Christian history. Neither Jesus nor his disciples found an easy answer to it. The Master was greatly concerned for the lost sheep of the house of Israel and loved Jerusalem with moving devotion. Yet his striking lack of interest in conserving the institutions and the culture of his society enables modern Jewish scholars such as Rabbi Klausner to maintain with some persuasiveness that the guardians of Jewish society were justified in rejecting his leadership. This apparently paradoxical attitude of the gospels is restated in variant forms in the other New Testament documents and in the writings of the Christian fathers. It is mirrored in the dual and antithetical types of Christian organization-the so-called 'churches' which undertake to organize and defend the nations and cultures in which they function, and the so-called 'sects' which withdraw from the world of non-Christian society.

Though the problem is so rooted in the nature of both Church and secular society that it is always present, yet it has a peculiar urgency for the modern church which is confronted with unusual evidences of misery in the life of human communities and of weakness within itself. Christians live today in and with nations that are either dying or over which the threat of doom hangs like a heavy cloud. Some of them are miserable in abject physical poverty; some seem hopelessly divided within themselves; some are powerful and affluent beyond the imagination of past years but full of internal anxieties and badgered by fears. In a general atmosphere of spiritual confusion political decisions are made uncertainly and hesitatingly. Apprehension of disaster has taken the place of the hope of progress as the dominant mood and motive of action.

Looking upon these societies, Christians, individually and in the community of the Church are moved to weep over them as Jeremiah and Jesus wept over Jerusalem. They feel impelled to seek the peace of the cities in which they dwell as Paul and Augustine sought the peace of Rome. Their sense of responsibility has many roots-the love of neighbor inculcated by centuries of teaching and example, the faith in a God whose nature it is to order and redeem no less than to create. But one highly important root of the sense of obligation is the Christians' recognition that they have done not a little to make the secular societies what they are. In this respect the modern church is in a wholly different position from that which the New Testament church or even the church of Augustine's time occupied. The Christian community of our time, whether or not formally united, is one of the great organizations and movements in civilization; it is one of the oldest human societies; it has been the teacher of most of the nations now in existence. It cannot compare itself with the small, weak company of the early centuries living in the midst of secular societies that had grown up independently of it. The American, Russian and British empires as well as the German and Italian, challenge the Church to a sense of responsibility, therefore, which the Roman Empire could never call forth. They were not suckled in their infancy by wolves but nursed and baptized by the Church; it instructed them in their youth and has been the companion of their maturity.

The poignancy and urgency of the present question about the Church's responsibility for society are due then as much to the Church's consideration of its own plight as to its sympathy with the tragic empires and threatened cities of our age. It is doubtful whether Christian communities have suffered more from bad conscience at any time since the sixteenth century than they do now. There have been times when the Church felt itself more seriously threatened from without than it does

today, but it has not often questioned its own adequacy so much as it does now, and a major cause of this self-questioning is its sense of responsibility for the ruined and threatened societies with which it is associated.

When these things are spoken of many voices offer many counsels. No single, clear prophetic cry challenges the attention and consent of Christians in mass. Perhaps no such voice will be heard; not every time of crisis is blessed with the gift of an apostle or reformer. Christian people may need to find their way today, as in some past periods of confusion, by means of simple, democratic, equalitarian discussion and decision, relying on no dominant human leader but on the Spirit in the churches. However that may be, in anticipation or without hope of prophetic revival, the time requires of all Christian folk in all these associations profound and continuous thought on the great issues of human life. In particular they need to reflect upon their responsibility for the states, nations and cultures of mankind so that their social decisions may be made in the full light of understanding rather than under the guidance of ancient habit or of emotionally charged catchwords. The following reflections are offered as a contribution to that end. Beginning with a definition of the Christian idea of responsibility they proceed to examine the erroneous or heretical forms of church responsibility and conclude with an effort to understand the positive content of the Church's social obligation by considering its functions as apostle, pastor and pioneer of humanity.

II. THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY

Responsibility to and for

To be responsible is to be able and required to give account to someone for something. The idea of responsibility, with the freedom and obligation it implies, has its place in the context of social relations. To be responsible is to be a self in the presence of other selves, to whom one is bound and to whom one is able to answer freely; responsibility includes stewardship or trusteeship over things that belong to the common life of the selves. The question about the one to whom account must be rendered is of equal importance with the question about the what for which one must answer. The responsibility of rulers in political society varies not only with the number of functions they exercise but also with the sovereign to whom they must account for their rulership. The doctrine of divine right makes kings responsible to God alone and exempts them from all obligation to answer to the people. An extreme type of democratic doctrine teaches that governors are responsible only to the people they govern or to the majority of such people. Most modern democracies rest on a profounder and less popular conception of responsibility, both rulers and people being regarded as accountable to some universal principle--God, Nature or Reason--as well as to one another. The difference between these two conceptions of democracy is very great. For the first kind, the will of the people is sovereign and makes anything right or wrong; the representatives of the people are bound to obey the popular desire. According to the second conception, there is a moral law to which the people themselves owe allegiance and which governors, legislatures and courts are bound to obey even in opposition to the popular will. Such a conception of responsibility is implicit in the Bill of Rights.

The kinds of irresponsibility

The double reference implied in the concept of responsibility is clarified by an examination of the nature of irresponsibility. A person may be irresponsible, of course, in the sense that he lacks the true qualifications of a self, but if he has freedom or the ability to answer he may be morally irresponsible, in the sense that he refuses to give account to those to whom he owes an answer for common goods, or in the sense that he offers a false account for the things entrusted to him. The first

sort of irresponsibility is the kind which appears in the "public-be-damned" attitude once explicitly adopted by some great corporations and still somewhat in vogue, as when great manufacturing or financial concerns resist the right of the public to be given an accounting for human and monetary values. The second sort of irresponsibility appears in the economic life in the criminal acts of defaulters who falsify accounts. Politically the first sort of irresponsibility is manifest in the claim of nations to sovereignty, that is, to their claim to be under obligation to no power beyond themselves or to be justified in doing anything that seems necessary to preserve national existence. The second type of irresponsibility in the political life may be found in wastage of natural resources and particularly in the political exploitation of human lives, in the name of some high ideal.

The scope of responsibility

It is clear from these examples and from reflection on ordinary experience that the "to-whom" and the "for-what" elements in responsibility are closely connected. What a man is responsible for depends in part at least on the being to whom he is accountable. If he must make answer to a nation he is required to consider more values than if he must answer only to the stockholders of a mercantile company. Some of the perennial conflicts between representatives of political and of economic institutions seem to be due to the fact that the former generally have future generations in mind, while the latter rarely have, whether they are labor leaders or businessmen. If a man responds to the demands of a universal God, then the neighbors for whom he is responsible are not only the members of the nation to which he belongs but the members of the total society over which God presides. If one must give account to a God who tries the "heart and reins," then one must answer for invisible as well as for overt acts. Responsibility is a universal feature of the social life of men, but the content of responsibility varies with the nature of the society to which men understand themselves to belong. In the company of God and of immortal souls even family responsibility is greater and more inclusive than in the company of nations and of men who are regarded as purely temporal beings. When men know that they stand before an infinite judge and creator the content of their obligation becomes infinite; they are required to exercise moral freedom in all areas of existence; no part of conduct remains a matter of indifference or subject to pure necessity; nowhere can man act without the liberty and obligation of moral agency.

Responsibility to God

These reflections on the general nature of responsibility have partly defined the form of the Church's accountability. The Christian community must conceive its responsibility in terms of membership in the divine and universal society; it knows that it must give answer to the God who is Lord of heaven and earth for everything with which it deals. It is necessary, however, if the Church's peculiar sense of obligation is to be illuminated, to define the Being to whom it is answerable as God-in-Christ and Christ-in-God. Indeed the Church itself must be described in these terms as the community which responds to God-in-Christ and Christ-in-God. A society which does not acknowledge its obligation to render account to this God and this Christ may call itself church but it is difficult to attach specific meaning to the term. Without the sense of moral dependence upon or of obligation to Christ a society lacks the moral reality of the Church. It may be a religious association of some sort but it is no church in the historic sense of the word. In the New Testament the Church appears, first of all, as the company of those who answer the call of Jesus and then as the fellowship of those who await his return. In both instances the Church responds to more than a historical Jesus. The disciples answer him as one who has authority. He is a prophet and more than a prophet. He has words of eternal life. There is a universal and an everlasting, a powerful, inescapable content in what he says and does. When they respond to him and follow him they respond and follow an eternal reality in the temporal.

In awaiting his return they anticipate the coming of no finite and passing being, but of one who represents the victory of life over death, of love over evil. Before his judgment seat they expect to be required to give account not for their treatment of the limited number of friends and neighbors of the finite Jesus, but of all the sick, imprisoned, hungry, thirsty men of the world-the neighbors, brothers and companions of an omnipresent being. It is to God-in-Christ, to the universal, absolute and unconditioned in the particular that the early church renders account. Moreover, it feels its responsibility to God-in-Christ not only as an eschatological community hastening toward a final and inclusive judgment, but also as a spiritual society, aware of the presence of the living Spirit of Jesus Christ, which is the Spirit of God. At every moment the company of Christians as well as each Christian renders account to the present Lord who is in the midst of every two or three persons meeting in his name. Its responsibility is not merely a preparation to answer in the future for all its words and deeds, but a continuous opening of the whole book of life to the inspecting and correcting activity of the ever-present Spirit of God.

We must invert the formula now and note that the being to whom the Church responds is Christ-in-God as well as God-in-Christ. The Church looks not only to the absolute in the finite but to the redemptive principle in the absolute. God, it believes and confesses, is love; He is mercy; He so loved the world that He gave His best-loved for its redemption; it is His will that the wicked should not perish but turn from their ways and live. To be a Christian church is to be a community which is always aware of and always responding to the redemptive principle in the world, to Christ-in-God, to the Redeemer.

Universal responsibility

It becomes clear that the content of the Church's responsibility is largely determined by the nature of the one to whom it renders account. Since it God-in-Christ whom it answers the content of its responsibility is universal. It is not a corporation with limited liability. All beings existent in the world are the creatures of this creator and the concern of this redeemer. The questions, "Who is my neighbor?" and "What is good?" need to be answered in a wholly inclusive way by the Church which lives in the presence of and in expectation of the coming in power of this Lord. All men and all societies, all the realms of being, belong to the neighborhood in which this community of Christians is required to perform its functions for the common welfare. Whatever is, is good in the world of this God-in-Christ. It may be perverted, sinful, broken; but it is not bad, for God-in-Christ made it and maintains it. Such universal responsibility is incompatible with a spiritualism that limits the Church's concern to immaterial vales, with a moralism that does not understand the value of the sinner and the sinful nation, with an individualism that makes mankind as a whole and its societies of less concern to God than single persons, with any of those particularistic and polytheistic theories of value and responsibility which substitutes for God-in-Christ some other deity as the source of valuable being. Moreover, since it is Christ-in-God to whom account must be rendered the content of responsibility is always mercy. The Church is not responsible for the judgement or destruction of any beings in the world of God, but for the conservation, reformation, redemption and transfiguration of whatever creatures its action touches. Whatever may be said in terms of the eschatological parable about the future role of the Church as judge of the nations, nothing belongs to its present responsibility for which it cannot answer to the one who gave his life as ransom and whose whole activity was a seeking and saving of the lost.

III. IRRESPONSIBLE RELIGION

From this general description of the Church's responsibility we must now move to the consideration of its accountability for society. The nature of the latter may be illuminated for us to

some extent if we consider, first of all, the ways in which the Church has been and can be socially irresponsible. Two sorts of temptations seem especially prevalent in history, the temptation to worldliness and the one to isolationism. In the case of the former the "to whom," in the case of the latter the "for what," of responsibility is mistakenly defined.

The worldly church

The first sort of irresponsibility or perversion of Christian social responsibility results from the substitution of human society itself for God-in-Christ. Instead of, "What doth the Lord require?" the question in the mind of the church which has fallen into this temptation is, "What does the nation or the civilization require?" It thinks of itself as responsible to society for God rather than to God for society. In this situation the church is more concerned about social approval and disapproval than about the divine judgment, and its end is more the promotion of the glory of society than of God. The societies to which Christians may feel responsible are various. Now it is a nation, now the society of mankind as a whole; now it is the conservative, now the radical or revolutionary part of the cultural group in which the church lives. Social religion in distinction from religion that is loyal to God-in-Christ is readily identifiable when the human unit whose glory it seeks is a nation, as in the case of that section of the church in Germany which equated the Christian cause with that of National Socialism. It is not as readily identifiable when the unit whose glory is to be promoted is mankind as a whole. Bergson, for instance, in his excellent discussion of the Two Sources of Morality and Religion, notes that defensive religion is connected with closed societies, such as nations, but in relating the religion of aspiration to the open society of mankind as a whole he does not apparently note sufficiently that mankind as a whole is also finite. From the point of view of Christian faith a humanistic church is closely akin to a nationalistic church. The substitution of any society for the infinite and absolute God involves the Church in a kind of irresponsibility in the course of which it actually betrays the society it seeks to serve.

What is true of the difference between responsibility to the smaller or larger human society is true also of the difference between the sense of accountability to the more conservative and to the more revolutionary elements in society. Generally social religion of the sort described which depends on public approval seeks the esteem of those parts of society which have been established in power and enjoy the prestige attached to customary authority. The worldly church is usually a church which seeks to maintain the old order in society and with it the power of the monarchs and aristocrats, of the owners of property and of other vested rights. However, the temptation Church's interest in order, the latter because of its interest in the reformation of unjust order, but in either case if it seeks to gain the good will simply of society or parts of society and makes itself responsible to them for supplying certain religious values it has become irresponsible in a Christian sense since it has substituted men for God. This sort of worldliness is a protean thing. It appears as feudalism, capitalism and proletarian Christianity, as nationalism and internationalism, as the defensive faith of the educated classes or as that of the untutored.

False prophecy and false priesthood

The church which has fallen into this temptation seeks to supply the societies upon whose approval it depends with supernatural grace or with religious aid of one sort or another. It tries to render account to men for its stewardship of religious values. It is a mediator of God not in the true prophetic sense but in the fashion of the false prophets. It tends to give society the assurance that its form of organization and its customs are divinely ordained, that it enjoys the special protection and favor of God, that it is a chosen people. Many Thanksgiving Day proclamations and sermons offer clear-cut examples of such pious worldliness. Again the secularized social church may undertake to

aid a human society in its pursuit of the great values of peace and prosperity. It may do this by endeavoring to persuade men that the order which is in effect has divine sanction, by threatening all protests against it with supernatural punishment, and by scores of other more or less creditable devices. In ancient times and by non-Christian folk the usual method for gaining divine approval was by way of sacrifice.

In more sophisticated times social religion may try to serve society by subjective and psychologically effective means, seeking to supply not so much a supernatural as a natural, psychological aid. It may try to generate "moral dynamic" by means of worship, assuage the passions with the aid of prayer and stimulate "good will" by means of meditation. It may turn its educational work into an effort to create good citizens" or effective revolutionaries. The line between a Christian conduct that is responsible to God and one which is responsible to society is often hard to discover in such situations, but whenever worship has become subjective, that is, directed toward effecting socially desired changes in the worshiper, and education has become moralistic, it seems safe to assume that one is dealing with worldly religion.

The temptation to this sort of irresponsibility is particularly great in the modern world. It is great because human societies, in the form of nations and of civilizations, have become very powerful and seem to hold in their hands both the blessings and the curses that are to be visited on men. The belief that the fate of mankind depends on the decisions of the leaders of empire is widespread and pervasive. The temptation is enhanced by the long nurtured illusion of social progress, which leads men to believe that the meaning of human existence must be realized in some organization of human societies dwelling on the planet. Again the tendency to look upon all matters from a social point of view has increased the temptation of the Church to consider itself as responsible to society. Much social science, including the sociology of religion, has tended to erect society itself into a kind of first principle, the source of all human movements and institutions. It has not only described the relations of religion to other functions in social life but seemed to explain it as nothing but a social function. When the Church has accepted this view of itself it has given evidence of its complete fall into worldliness, for now it has substituted civilization or society for God as author and end of its being.

Isolationism in the Church

The most important reason, doubtless, for the prevalence of such "social religion" in modern Christian churches is their reaction against the isolationism which long characterized many of them. Isolationism is the heresy opposite to worldliness. It appears when the Church seeks to respond to God but does so only for itself. The isolated church is keenly aware of the fact that it must answer to God-in-Christ for all its deeds and for all the values it administers. But it thinks of itself as the being for which it must answer and it regards the secular societies with which it lives as outside the divine concern. Its attitude toward them is like that of certain Israelites toward the Gentiles or of Greeks toward barbarians--they are beyond the pale. What is the Church, according to this conception, is the intense development of its own life and the careful guarding of its holiness. This holiness religion is intensely self-regarding both with respect to the individual Christian and with respect to the Christian community. It thinks of the secular societies as antagonists of the Christian Church and as beyond the possibility of redemption. They are not only mortal but sinful and must be shunned so far as possible because contact with them is defiling. The Church, on the other hand, is the community of those who are to be saved from sin as well as death. It is the ark of salvation and the concern of its officers and crew is to see that it rides safely through the storms which bring destruction to other groups and other men.

It is not unfair to call this holiness religion irresponsible, for it is so in the definite sense that

it disclaims accountability for secular societies. It rejects not only nationalism but nationality, not only worldliness but the world. The politics and economics and sometimes the family life of human groups are regarded by the extremer advocates of holiness faith as too defiling for contact. Hence the isolated church disclaims all interest in these social functions and with the disclaimer tends to abandon the secular societies to their own devices.

The history of the Church contains many examples of more or less extreme isolationism. Second-century Christianity, as represented in the epistles of John, in the "Didache" and other contemporary writings, tended to make the commandment not to love the world nor the things that are in the world into an injunction to separate the Christian community from the political and cultural societies of the time. It thought of the Church as a new society for the sake of which the world had been created and which was destined to govern the world. Again in the monastic movement the temptation to isolationism had to be combated ever and again by the great reformers who sought to make the monk a servant of mankind rather than a seeker after his own holiness. Protestant sects also have been tempted to pursue a sort of perfectionism that was highly self-regarding while another stream in Protestant religion has been so spiritualistic and individualistic that the concrete life of the secular societies has been actually ignored as beyond the scope of a spiritual church's responsibility.

These two sorts of irresponsibility, worldliness and isolationism, are evidently interdependent in so far as either extreme tends to call forth a reaction toward its antithesis. The general tendency of the Church in the twentieth century has been toward a conception of social responsibility which virtually made it an agent of secular society. Under the circumstances it is not impossible that a strong counter-movement will arise and that Christians will seek forms of church life that are independent of secular society not only in source but also in purpose. The true measure of the Church's responsibility is not to be found, however, by attending to either extreme or by seeking for a compromise position between them but rather by attending to the two aspects of Christian responsibility in the right way. The relation to God and the relation to society must neither be confused with each other as is the case in social religion, nor separated from each other as is the case in Christian isolationism; they must be maintained in the unity of responsibility to God for the neighbor.

IV. THE CHURCH AS APOSTLE, PASTOR AND PIONEER

The Church's responsibility to God for human societies doubtless varies with its own and the nations' changing positions, but it may be described in a general fashion by reference to the apostolic, the pastoral and the pioneering functions of the Christian community.

Apostolic responsibility

The Church is by nature and commandment an apostolic community which exists for the sake of announcing the Gospel to all nations and of making them disciples of Christ. The function of the Church as apostolic messenger to individuals is clear-cut, but emphasis upon it ought not to lead to the obscuring of its mission to social groups. The Gospel must be announced in different fashion when it is addressed to America or to Russia from the way in which it is proclaimed to individual Americans or Russians. Here again no absolute distinction can be made, but it does seem important and imperative that the Church should discharge its apostolic responsibility by envisaging the needs of men in their societies as well as in their isolation before God. This seems the more urgent in our time because the unbelief, the fear and sin of man come to exhibition more dramatically in the public life than elsewhere. The phenomenon of nationalism is religious in character; so also is the worship of civilization which seems to pervade the democratic societies. On the one hand, the social groups

appear to be idolatrous in a sense that few of the individuals in them are; on the other hand, the idolatry of the great groups seems to arise out of that despair of God and the meaning of life for which the Gospel supplies the cure. As the apostolic Church it is the function of the Christian community to proclaim to the great human societies, with all the persuasiveness and imagination at its disposal, with all the skill it has in becoming all things to all men, that the center and heart of all things, the first and last Being, is utter goodness, complete love. It is the function of the Church to convince not only men but mankind, that the goodness which appeared in history in the form of Jesus Christ was not defeated but rose triumphantly from death. Today these messages are preached to individuals but their relevance to nations and civilizations is not adequately illuminated. The Church has not yet in its apostolic character made the transition from an individualistic to a social period which historic movements require. When it does take its social responsibility seriously it all too often thinks of society as a physical and not a spiritual form of human existence and it tends, therefore, to confine its care of society to interest in the prosperity and peace of men in their communities.

It is a part of the apostle's duty to continue the prophetic function of preaching repentance. The good news about the glory of divine goodness is neither rightly proclaimed nor rightly heard if it is not combined with the bad news about the great injustice which prevails in God's world. It is impossible for the Church in Germany to give assurance to the German nation that it is not the will of God that this sinful people should perish without at the same time assuring the nation that its transgressions must be recognized and condemned. So the apostolic Church in America cannot announce the mercy of God without pointing out how this nation transgresses the limits assigned to men when it defrauds the Negro and refuses to condemn itself for the indiscriminate manner in which it made war in its use of obliteration bombing, or deals with defeated nations in the spirit of retribution rather than of redemption.

It is not enough that the Church should discharge its apostolic function by speaking to governments. Its message is to the nations and societies, not to the officials. A truly apostolic Church may indeed address presidents, legislatures, kings and dictators as the prophets and Paul did of old; but like them it will be less inclined to deal with the mighty than with the great mass, with the community as it exists among the humble. How the Church is to carry out this apostolic task in our time is one of the most difficult problems it confronts. Its habits and customs, its forms of speech and its methods of proclamation come from a time when individuals rather than societies were in the center of attention. Responsibility to the living God requires in this case as in all others an awareness of the immediate moment and its needs, a willingness to reconstruct one's own habits in order that the neighbor's needs may be met, a readiness to depart from tradition in order that the great tradition of service may be followed.

The shepherd of the lost

The Church discharges its responsibility to God for society in carrying out its pastoral as well as its apostolic functions. It responds to Christ-in-God by being a shepherd of the sheep, a seeker of the lost, the friend of publicans and sinners, of the poor and broken-hearted. Because of its pastoral interest in individuals the Church has found itself forced to take an interest in political and economic measures or institutions. Many of the early leaders of the social gospel movement were pastors whose concern for individual slum dwellers, the poor, the prisoners and the sick led them to attack the social sources of human misery and to understand the corporate character of human sin. Genuine pastoral interest in individuals will always lead to such results. The Church cannot be responsible to God for men without becoming responsible for their societies. As the interdependence of men increases in an industrial and technological civilization the responsibility for dealing with the great networks of interrelationship increases. If the individual sheep is to be protected the flock must be

guarded.

The pastoral responsibility of the Church for society is, however, direct as well as indirect. Compassion and concern for the Jewish people as a whole, pastoral interest in the defeated nations and in the victors who stand in great moral danger characterize the Church which responds to the God who not only creates men but also their societies. This pastoral mission of the Church to the nations includes all those measures of large-scale relief and liberation which the times call for. It cannot be sufficient for the Church to call upon the governments of nations to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. Direct action is required here as elsewhere.

The Church as social pioneer

Finally, the social responsibility of the Church needs to be described as that of the pioneer. The Church is that part of the human community which responds first to God-in-Christ and Christ-in-God. It is the sensitive and responsive part in every society and mankind as a whole. It is that group which hears the Word of God, which sees His judgments, which has the vision of the resurrection. In its relations with God it is the pioneer part of society that responds to God on behalf of the whole society, somewhat, we may say, as science is the pioneer in responding to pattern or rationality in experience and as artists are the pioneers in responding to beauty. This sort of social responsibility may be illustrated by reference to the Hebrew people and the prophetic remnant. The Israelites, as the major prophets ultimately came to see, had been chosen by God to lead all nations to Him. It was that part of the human race which pioneered in understanding the vanity of idol worship and in obeying the law of brother-love. Hence in it all nations were eventually to be blessed. The idea of representational responsibility is illustrated particularly by Jesus Christ. As has often been pointed out by theology, from New Testament times onward, he is the first-born of many brothers not only in resurrection but in rendering obedience to God. His obedience was a sort of pioneering and representative obedience; he obeyed on behalf of men, and so showed what men could do and drew forth a divine response in turn toward all the men he represented. He discerned the divine mercy and relied upon it as representing men and pioneering for them.

This thought of pioneering or representational responsibility has been somewhat obscured during the long centuries of individualist overemphasis. Its expression in the legal terms of traditional theology is strange and often meaningless to modern ears. Yet with our understanding of the way that life is involved with life, of the manner in which self and society are bound together, of the way in which small groups within a nation act for the whole, it seems that we must move toward a conception similar to the Hebraic and medieval one.

In this representational sense the Church is that part of human society, and that element in each particular society, which moves toward God, which as the priest acting for all men worships Him, which believes and trusts in Him on behalf of all, which is the first to obey Him when it becomes aware of a new aspect of His will. Human society in all of its divisions and aspects does not believe. Its institutions are based on unbelief, on lack of confidence in the Lord of heaven and earth. But the Church has conceived faith in God and moves in the spirit of that trust as the hopeful and obedient part of society.

In ethics it is the first to repent for the sins of a society, and it repents on behalf of all. When it becomes apparent that slavery is transgression of the divine commandment, then the Church repents of it turns its back upon it, abolishes it within itself. It does this not as the holy community separate from the world but as the pioneer and representative. It repents for the sin of the whole

society and leads in the social act of repentance. When the property institutions of society are subject to question because innocent suffering illuminates their antagonism to the will of God, then the Church undertakes to change its own use of these institutions and to lead society in their reformation. So also the Church becomes a pioneer and representative of society in the practice of equality before God, in the reformation of institutions of rulership, and in the acceptance of mutual responsibility of individuals for one another.

In our time, with its dramatic revelations of the evils of nationalism, of racialism and of economic imperialism it is the evident responsibility of the Church to repudiate these attitudes within itself and to act as the pioneer of society in doing so. The apostolic proclamation of good and bad news to the colored races without a pioneering repudiation of racial discrimination in the Church contains a note of insincerity and unbelief. The prophetic denunciation of nationalism without a resolute rejection of nationalism in the Church is mostly rhetorical. As the representative and pioneer of mankind the Church meets its social responsibility when in its own thinking, organization and action it functions as a world society, undivided by race, class and national interests.

This seems to be the highest form of social responsibility in the Church. It is the direct demonstration of love of God and neighbor rather than a repetition of the commandment to self and others. It is the radical demonstration of faith. Where this responsibility is being exercised there is no longer any question about the reality of the Church. In pioneering and representative action of response to God in Christ the invisible Church becomes visible and the deed of Christ is reduplicated.